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LOS ANGELES TIMES

One Ace Gumshoe and Two Pairs of Opposite Siblings

TV REVIEWS

By HOWARD ROSENBERG
TIMES TELEVISION CRITIC

This is a lean night for new series, the yield consisting of two low-grade ABC comedies and a so-so CBS hour about a rehabilitated super gumshoe.

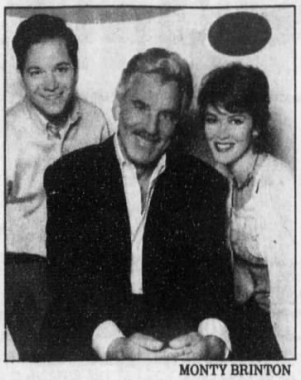
In "Buddy Faro," CBS delivers a series whose pilot is well-directed and strong on style while introducing Dennis Farina as the fabled Buddy, a fallen Hollywood private eye who used to "own this town" until vanishing in 1978. It turns out that, for reasons clarified late in the episode, Buddy has been molting in Mexico, where he is located in a cesspool of booze by admiring young private eye Bob Jones (Frank Whaley), and then returned to L.A. for fast retooling.

Just like that he's the old snazzy, swaggering Buddy, looking like Farina instead of reclusive, hair-matted Howard Hughes, but responding with amazement to the changes that have taken place during his long siesta in Rip Van Winkledom (what, no pro football in L.A.?).

Brazen Buddy and colorless Bob soon expand to a trio when joined by swell-looking Julie Barber (Allison Smith). So different are they it raises the headline question such series have been asking for decades: How Can These Opposites Possibly Get Along and Work Together?

Just who wants to find Buddy and why? And whom does Buddy want to find once *he's* found? Although "Buddy Faro" and Farina look good, the payoff to the opening gambit is weak, and missing here almost entirely is the wit that you would expect from a series aspiring to be a sophisticated comic romp. This script failure is compounded by Farina's inability to navigate Buddy beyond one-note brashness. A capable *second* banana, but. . . .

"Buddy Faro" belongs in the Louvre, however, compared with harmless but horrid "Two of a Kind" and "Brother's Keeper," whose presence, along with returning "Boy Meets World," makes "Sabrina, the Teenage Witch" the only crone worth watching in ABC's two-hour slab of TGIF comedies.



MONTY BRINTON

Dennis Farina, center, stars as private eye Buddy Faro, with Frank Whaley and Allison Smith.

As for humorless "Two of a Kind," what ABC is hoping to clone in this time slot are the strong ratings of "Full House," its former 8 p.m. little-tyke comedy that found twins Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen alternating as Bob Saget's daughter, Michelle.

Using their actual given names on "Two of a Kind," the Olsens maneuver their widower dad (Christopher Sieber), a science professor, into hiring as their baby-sitter one of his least-favorite students (Sally Wheeler), a 26-year-old who doesn't take kindly to his 7:30 a.m. lab. How this foursome interacts will be the show.

Actually, the Olsens' 11-year-old characters are not really two of a kind, in that Mary Kate is a budding glamour girl and Ashley a budding jock. Talk about your tension. What neither of the Olsens is, at this stage, is a budding thespian. Not that the writing here helps them out. And not that any of this likely will matter in a series where the twins' proven charisma with the younger set may be enough to carry the day.

Only a bit better is "Brother's Keeper," another of TV's "move-in" comedies, the invader this time being the infantile pro football-playing brother (Sean O'Bryan) of a straight-arrow English teacher (William Ragsdale).

It seems that a condition of Bobby's multimillion-dollar contract as a field goal kicker is that he live with someone responsible. And that will be—*oh nohhhh*—his big brother, Porter, an academic whose obsessive squareness is the antithesis of Bobby's life of babes and bars.

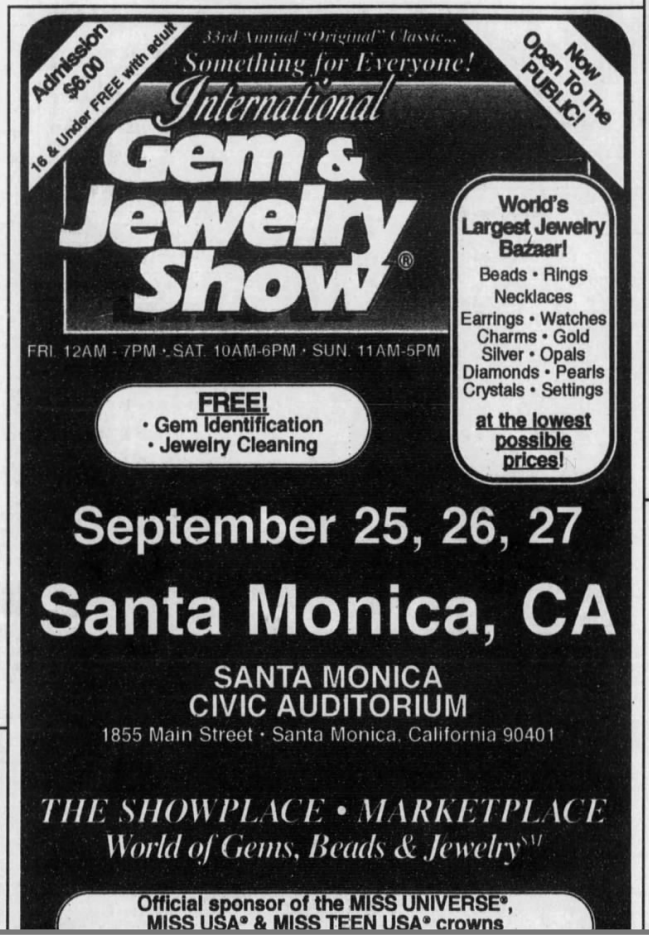
If you're thinking "The Odd Couple," you're right, the major difference being that "Brother's Keeper" is as laugh-less as it is lifeless, its epic moment coming when Porter gets a marble stuck up his nose. Another difference is that Porter has an 8-year-old son, Oscar (Justin Cooper), with a Dutchboy 'do. He takes a shine to Bobby. But Bobby gets a baby-sitter of his own in the person of a female sports agent.

Meanwhile, this series has a marble stuck up its you-know-what.

■ *"Two of a Kind" premieres at 8 tonight on ABC Channel 7. The network has rated it TV-G (all ages).*

■ *"Brother's Keeper" premieres at 9:30 tonight on ABC Channel 7. The network has rated it TV-G (all ages).*

■ *"Buddy Faro" premieres at 9 tonight on CBS Channel 2. The network has rated it TV-PG-LV (may be unsuitable for young children, with advisories for coarse language and violence).*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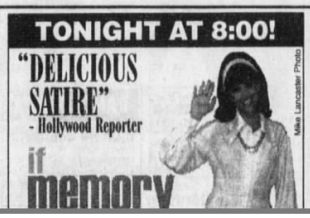

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